

## Romantic Beliefs and Myths in Spain

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Data from a representative sample of the Spanish population (1,949 participants between ages 18 and 65) were analyzed to examine the strength of the principal romantic myths and the link between sex, love, and marriage in Spain. A survey was made up and was administered by interviewers. The results show the strength of these myths and the relationship between the three above-mentioned variables. Women, people with fewer years of formal education, and older people were more likely to believe in the myths and the relation between sex, love, and marriage was stronger in these groups. The findings are discussed in terms of different psychosocial theories.

*Key words:* romantic myths, sex, love, marriage

En este artículo se analizan los datos de una investigación realizada con una muestra representativa de la población española respecto a la vigencia de los principales mitos románticos y la vinculación entre sexo, amor y matrimonio. Se elaboró un cuestionario para evaluar dichas variables, que fue administrado, en forma de entrevista, a 1.949 personas. Los resultados indican la gran vigencia de dichos mitos y la estrecha relación entre las tres variables indicadas anteriormente, especialmente en el caso de las mujeres, personas de mayor edad y con menor nivel de estudios. Los resultados se comentan desde diferentes teorías psicosociales.

*Palabras claves:* mitos románticos, sexo, amor, matrimonio

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Since Rougemont's (1938) and Burgess and Locke's (1945) pioneer works, myths and cultural beliefs concerning love, marriage, sex and the interconnection between them has been considered a key issue to understand intimate relationships (Cancian, 1987; Crosby, 1973; Goode, 1959; Hetch, Marston, & Larkey, 1994; Kayser, 1993; Martínez-Íñigo, 1997; Noller, 1996; Solomon, 1988; Yela, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998). Recently, Dion and Dion (1996) have claimed more attention for cultural variables related to close relationships. Despite the universal or particular nature of love, the main issue has been the meaning and function that each culture, throughout different historical periods, has assigned to love, and the consequences this has on intimate relationships (Jankowiak & Fisher, 1992). Taking into account the main role love plays in human happiness, health, and general satisfaction (Argyle, 1987; Barrón, 1990), and the relevance to the social structure of interpersonal relations based on love, marriage is still the cornerstone of the family in our culture (Simpson, Campbell, & Berscheid, 1986; C.I.R.E.S., 1992). One can see that scientific knowledge of these issues could offer solutions about how to confront and solve the problems, which may emerge in and from relationships.

Some authors, belonging to academic research and clinical practice, have pointed out that expectations, beliefs, and the meaning that subjects attach to some events in their intimate relationships are sources of disappointment, lack of affection, and instability (Beck, 1988; Dion & Dion, 1996; Ellis & Grieger, 1977; Kayser, 1993; Noller, 1996). Most of these beliefs are cultural constructs shared by individuals. Each historical period has developed a different view of love, sex, and marriage; consequently, the relationship between these three elements has changed throughout time. In ancient Greece, affective relationships (hetero- and fundamentally homosexual) were closely linked to the sexual sphere and clearly separated from marriage. In marriage, only the wife was required to be sexually faithful to her husband, and the purpose of sex was exclusively procreation. During the Roman Empire, erotic and recreational pleasure was also separate from marriage, linked to occasional and sporadic conquests. In the High Middle Ages, love, marriage, and sexual pleasure were regarded as three independent entities to be satisfied in different relationships. From the 16th to the 18th century, arranged marriage continued to exist simultaneously with extramarital "romantic love," which was nonsexual, originating in medieval genteel love. Since the beginning of the 19th century, the links between the romantic love concepts, marriage, and sexuality emerge, and this trend was consolidated in our century. From then on, romantic love ceased to be minority and became popular and normative. Marriage emerged as a personal choice; both romantic love and sexual satisfaction should be satisfied within marriage or a stable relationship (Fisher, 1992; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992; Iglesias de Ussel, 1987; Malo

de Molina, 1992; Martín Gaité, 1987; Ortega y Gasset, 1926, 1952; Rougemont, 1938; Solomon, 1988; Yela, 1995).

Taking into account this historical process and the initial considerations about culture and intimate relationships, we carried out a survey on a representative sample of the Spanish population in order to explore whether lay people hold the beliefs that some authors define as distinctive of contemporary love (Averill & Boothroyd, 1977; Cook & McHenry, 1978; Good, 1976; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992; Liebowitz, 1983; Peele, 1975; Schaef, 1989; Simon, Eder, & Evans, 1992; Simpson et al., 1986; Sternberg, 1988; Tennov, 1979; Van Sommers, 1987). We classified these beliefs, using the recent review of scientific literature on intimate-relationship beliefs carried out by Yela (1995). We consider this classification useful for our research aims. Concretely, we assessed the following myths or beliefs:

1. The *equivalence* myth: love understood necessarily as a strong passion, supposedly the same as "being in love" (so that if one does not feel the same passion as in the first days, it means one does not really love one's partner, and should therefore put an end to the relationship).
2. The *"better-half"* myth: the belief that, in some way, there is someone predestined for each person.
3. The *exclusiveness (of being in love)* myth: which assumes that it is impossible to be in love with two people at the same time.
4. The *eternal passion* myth: the belief that the intense passion of the first stages, if it is real, will last, or it should last, forever.
5. The *omnipotence (love conquers all)* myth: which implies that trusting real love will get around and overcome all obstacles.
6. The *fidelity* myth: which, in its extreme formulation, supposes that if someone is really in love, he or she will always be sexually faithful to the partner (therefore, if one is not faithful, one does not really love one's partner).
7. The *marriage* myth: which considers that love, that is, passion or being in love, is the one and only reason for marriage.
8. The *couple* myth: which states that the couple-relationship is inherent to human nature and, as such, present in all eras and cultures.

As tentative hypothesis, we posited that most people in Spain, as in other western countries, would hold these beliefs, which we called *romantic myths*. Moreover, we explored the differences according to sex, age, and social and cultural level. Finally, we were interested in the connection between these myths, marriage, and sex. According to the historical process described above, we expected to find a strong connection between these three elements. The role of sociodemographic variables was also considered. This is the first time these issues were empirically tested on a representative sample of Spanish population.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were Spanish men ( $n = 955$ ) and women ( $n = 994$ ), ranging from 18 to 65 years of age, living in towns of over 2,000 inhabitants, including island provinces. In all, 1,949 interviews were carried out. The participants were divided into five age ranges: 18-24 years old ( $n = 367$ ), 25-34 ( $n = 487$ ), 35-44 ( $n = 398$ ), 45-54 ( $n = 329$ ), and 55-64 ( $n = 366$ ).

We employed multiple steps and layers by clusters, selecting sample primary units (towns) and secondary units (sections) randomly, and the smallest units (individuals) by random paths and quotas of sex and age. The layers were formed by correlating the 17 regions to the size of habitat, divided into seven categories: less than 2,000 inhabitants; 2,001 to 10,000 inhabitants; 10,001 to 50,000; 50,001 to 100,000; 100,001 to 400,000; 400,001 to 1,000,000; and over a million inhabitants. The sample error, at the level of confidence of 95.5%, was  $\pm 2.23$  for the whole sample.

### Measures

From the above-mentioned theoretical backgrounds, a survey was created, which gathered information about the following variables: degree of support of romantic myths, link between love, sex, and marriage, sociodemographic variables (such as sex, age, and education,) and the other factors that the previous review of specialized literature on love show to be related theoretically or empirically to love relationships, sexual attitudes, sexual behavior, jealousy, and duration of the relationship (Yela, 1995). The survey was administered in the form of interviews, between July 5 and 30, 1995.

*Romantic myths.* Each myth was assessed with a specific item, which was simply the description of the myth (see above), with which the subject expressed his or her degree of agreement on a 5-interval continuum: 1 = *strongly disagree*; 2 = *disagree*; 3 = *neutral or medium*; 4 = *agree*; and 5 = *strongly agree*. The alternatives "don't know" and "no reply" were added. We also obtained a global myth score for each subject, which was the mean of the subject's scores on the myth items.

*Link between sex, love, and marriage.* A set of items, including the separation between each possible combination of two elements from the trio "sex, love, and marriage," assessed the connection between these three elements. The subject specified his or her level of agreement on a 5-interval continuum, where 1 = *elements were completely connected* and 5 = *elements were completely separate*. Therefore, subjects had to decide whether to explicitly accept or reject (point 3 being *medium or neutral*) sex

without marriage, love without marriage, sex without love, love without sex, marriage without sex, and marriage without love. A general score for sex-marriage-love separation was also calculated, represented by the mean of the six preceding scores.

*Feelings of jealousy.* Two dimensions of jealousy (emotional and sexual, according to Buunk & Bringle, 1987) were assessed by two items, with which the subject expressed his or her degree of agreement on a 5-interval continuum, where 1 = *strongly disagree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*. Emotional jealousy refers to the partner's intimacy with other people, and sexual jealousy refers explicitly to sexual relationships.

*Attitude towards fidelity.* Subjects were requested to express the importance of fidelity for them on a 4-interval continuum, where 1 = *not at all important*, and 4 = *very important*.

*Attraction towards others.* Measured by two items, subjects were requested to choose from seven categories, indicating the number of people to whom they had felt sexually (on one item) and emotionally (on the other) attracted. These categories were: "none," "1," "2 to 4," "5 to 10," "11 to 20," "21 to 100," "more than 100."

*Sexual experience.* As with feelings of sexual attraction towards others, subjects were requested to check one category, indicating with how many people they had had sexual relations, using the same categories as mentioned above.

*Years of formal education.* One question requested subjects to indicate the level of formal education they had achieved.

*Religious beliefs and behavior.* Seven options were offered: Catholic, other religions, indifferent, agnostic, atheist, an open option, and "I don't know or no reply". We grouped together the "believers" (Catholics and other religions) on the one hand, and the "non-believers" (atheists and agnostics) on the other. We also asked about the frequency of attending church services (categories were *never*, *a few times a year*, *a few times a month*, *almost every Sunday*, and *several days a week*).

Finally, we also asked subjects about their sex, age, and duration of their relationship.

## Results and Discussion

### Romantic Myths

The first data analysis provided us with the global percentages, the difference of mean scores between men and women, and Pearson's correlations between certain sociodemographic variables, such as age and level of studies. It is important to note the strength of romantic myths in romantic relationships in our society nowadays (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1

*Percentage of Believers in Myths; Means, Standard Deviations, and Differences in Romantic Myths, according to Sex*

		Men			Women			Difference	Total	
Myth	% believers	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Equivalence	45	3.12	1.18	924	3.10	1.26	965	—	3.11	1.22
“Better-half”	50	3.04	1.26	934	3.34	1.21	964	-5.32*	3.19	1.24
Exclusiveness	55	3.23	1.26	934	3.39	1.30	966	-2.69*	3.31	1.28
Eternal Passion	65	3.56	1.16	938	3.59	1.23	971	—	3.57	1.02
Omnipotence	75	3.84	1.05	943	3.99	1.02	966	-3.35*	3.91	1.03
Sexual Fidelity	80	3.91	0.99	947	4.16	0.91	987	-5.86*	4.03	0.96
Marriage	85	3.99	1.03	944	4.23	0.86	990	-5.69*	4.11	0.95
Couple	95	4.30	0.68	947	4.37	0.65	990	—	4.33	0.66
Global myth score	75%	3.63	0.58	865	3.78	0.57	875	-5.54*	3.71	0.57

Note. Empty cells indicate statistically nonsignificant differences.

\*  $p < .01$

Table 1 reveals that 75 % of the sample scored higher than 3 on the global myth score (which measured agreement with romantic myths). Only 15 % scored 3 or below (the remaining 10% did not reply to any myth items).

Concerning significant sex differences, Table 1 shows that women expressed stronger belief in five of the eight myths (better-half, exclusiveness, omnipotence, sexual fidelity, and marriage). The fact that women believed in romantic myths more than men is in accordance with the greater value they place on romanticism in occasional relationships as well as in stable ones (Dion & Dion, 1979; Houston, 1981). On the one hand, sex differences can be explained by the differential socialization process of sex. Sociobiologists point out that to choose a love-sex strategy, which would nowadays be considered romantic, has higher reproductive value for women, probably because of their greater adaptive capacity from an evolutionary point of view.

When we consider the myths altogether, we also observed a slightly stronger belief in women (general means were 3.63 and 3.78 for men and women, respectively,  $p = .000$ , as seen in Table 1).

Although the sex differences were statistically significant, they were still small and the mean for men (lower than that of women) for all myths was always over 3 (the so-called medium range value - although we cannot be sure of the psychological meaning of that central value as a "medium" or "central" point, as acknowledged by all researchers on attitudes). There were no statistically significant differences in the equivalence myth ( $M = 3.12$  and  $3.10$  for men and women, respectively), the eternal passion myth ( $M = 3.56$  and  $3.59$  for men and women, respectively), and the couple myth ( $M = 4.30$  and  $4.37$  for men and women, respectively). This shows the strength of romantic myths in today's Spanish population.

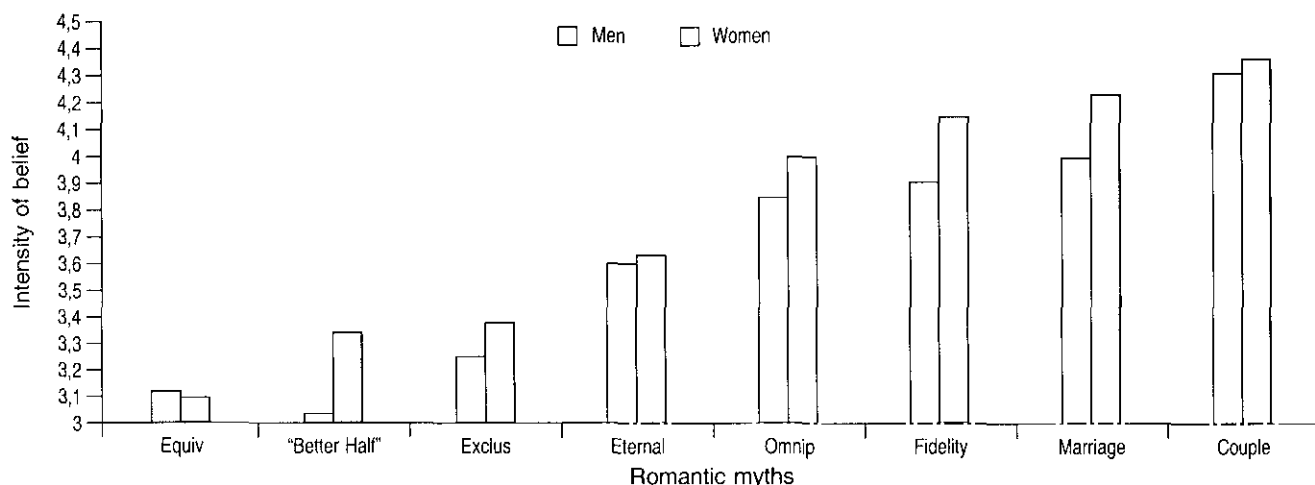


Figure 1. Intensity of the belief in romantic myths in the Spanish population.

As displayed in Table 2, the majority of the romantic myths correlate positively, although only moderately, with age (the correlation between age and the global score was  $r = .22, p = .000$ ). The differences between the romantic beliefs of the youngest group (18-25 years) and the oldest group (55-65 years) – where the greatest differences were observed – were almost always relatively small, and, in any case, smaller than expected (assuming that young people possess certain characteristics, such as rebelliousness, nonconformity, etc.). It may be that the new generations are somehow more conservative than the previous ones, and this includes issues of love and sex. However, romantic myths seem to be very extended.

Concerning the correlations between romantic myths and level of studies (see Table 2), they were, in general, negative and statistically significant at the level of confidence of 99%. In some cases, such as the eternal passion myth and the global myth score, the correlation was higher than  $r = -.25, p = .000$ .

Significant correlations and differences also appeared when taking into account religious beliefs. Agnostics and atheists ( $n = 177$ ) scored 3.25 on the global myth score, whereas believers (almost all were Catholics) scored 3.80,  $p = .000$ . Religious behavior was positively and significantly related to all myths, and also to the global myth score,  $r = .25, p = .000$ . Therefore, belief in romantic myths was stronger for Catholics and people with a lower level of education, and weaker for agnostics and people with higher education levels.

However, as shown in Tables 1 and 2, we will analyze each myth separately:

1. *The equivalence myth.* This was accepted by 45% of the sample (scoring 4 or 5), whereas 40% rejected it (scoring 1 or 2; only 7% totally disagreed), and the remaining 15% were made up of those who were doubtful (scoring 3) or did not reply. There were no statistically significant differences in sex or age, but, on the other hand, we found a statistically significant negative relation with the level of studies,  $r = -.14, p < .01$ . Belief in this myth has a notable effect on romantic relationships. Psychosocial investigations have stated that physiological, psychological, and interpersonal relation processes, typical of the intense state of "falling and being in love," slowly fade away and turn into different processes as the relationship develops (Liebowitz, 1983; Solomon, 1980; Sternberg, 1988; Wilson, 1981; Yela, 1997). That is why it is important for both members of the couple to accept this change as something natural instead of experiencing it as traumatic, as is usually the case.

2. *The better-half myth.* This myth was accepted by 50% of the sample, whereas 35% disagreed (answers in total disagreement did not reach 10%). This is where sex differences were more pronounced (but only 3.34 vs. 3.04 for women and men, respectively). Women agreed more, as with the rest of the myths. Results showed that belief in this myth increased with age,  $r = .13, p < .01$ , and tended to decrease with the level of studies,  $r = -.20, p < .01$ .

Table 2

*Correlations between Romantic Myths, Age, and Studies*

Myth	Age		Studies	
	<i>r</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>n</i>
Equivalence	—	1887	-.14*	1883
"Better-half"	.13*	1896	-.20*	1892
Exclusiveness	.15*	1898	-.10*	1894
Eternal Passion	.17*	1907	-.26*	1903
Omnipotence	.18*	1907	-.21*	1903
Sexual Fidelity	.18*	1932	-.18*	1928
Marriage	.15*	1932	-.13*	1928
Couple	—	1935	—	1931
Global myth score	-.22*	1738	-.30*	1734

Note. Empty cells indicate statistically nonsignificant differences.

\*  $p < .01$

3. *The exclusiveness of being in love myth.* This was accepted by 55% of the sample (only 8% disagreed totally). More women tended to share the belief, as did older people and those with a lower level of studies, although these differences were not large in either case.

4. *The eternal passion myth.* This myth is a problem because, sooner or later, it contradicts reality – due to well-known physiological, psychological, and interpersonal processes, for example, saturation, reduction of uncertainty, tolerance, the Coolidge effect, the law of changing emotions, etc. (Frijda, 1988; Skinner, 1953; Solomon, 1980; Wilson, 1981). Nevertheless, it was shared by approximately two thirds of the sample, whereas barely 5% of the sample disagreed totally with the myth. Both men and women believed in it: this myth correlated positively with age,  $r = .17, p < .01$ , and was the one with the highest correlation with the level of studies,  $r = -.26, p < .01$ .

5. *The omnipotence myth.* This myth was accepted by 75% of the sample; only 2% disagreed totally. As with the previous myths, the belief was weaker among the youngest and those with a higher level of studies. Up to 85% of the people with no studies and about half of the postgraduates accepted this belief as true.

6. *The fidelity myth.* This was accepted by 80% of the sample, whereas only 1% disagreed totally (note that the myth does not refer to the importance of fidelity but to its consideration as a necessary condition for true love). This could be taken as proof of the immense power of socialization in controlling biological instincts. On the other hand, although women agreed with the myth significantly more than men, the difference was quite small, and the percentage of men was higher one would expect (over 75% of the men agreed with it) if the forces on which sociobiology focuses were the only ones (or the predominant ones) that influence affective-sexual behavior. Furthermore,

Table 3

*Percentage of Acceptance of Dissociation of Love-Sex-Marriage: Means, Standard Deviations, and Differences According to Sex*

Dimensions	% Who agree			Agreement		Men			Women			Diff.
	Men	Women	Total	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>t</i>
Sex without Marriage	82	66	74	3.74	1.23	3.98	1.05	946	3.52	1.34	976	8.33*
Love without Marriage	70	65	67	3.57	1.21	3.64	1.16	919	3.50	1.24	962	2.32*
Sex without Love	63	33	47	2.91	1.44	3.38	1.34	940	2.46	1.40	976	14.8*
Love without Sex	34	30	32	2.57	1.31	2.66	1.28	929	2.47	1.33	957	3.15*
Marriage without Sex	18	21	19	2.14	1.18	2.10	1.14	933	2.19	1.22	952	—
Marriage without Love	19	18	18	2.01	1.21	2.02	1.21	927	2.00	1.21	973	—
Global myth score (separation of the three)	—	—	—	2.83	0.80	2.97	0.85	868	2.70	0.84	896	7.35*

Note. Empty cells indicate statistically nonsignificant differences.

\*  $p < .01$

we emphasize that the myth was expressed in its most radical form. The influence of the sociocultural factors can be seen in the significant correlations revealed between belief in this myth and age,  $r = .18$ ,  $p < .01$ , and with the level of studies,  $r = -.18$ ,  $p < .01$ .

7. *The marriage myth.* The marriage myth was accepted by 85 % of the sample. These data are similar to those of other studies carried out recently abroad (Simpson et al., 1986) as well as in Spain (C.I.R.E.S., 1992). As with the majority of the other myths, women, older people, and those with a lower level of studies accepted it more,  $p < .01$ .

8. *The couple myth.* Finally, the couple myth was accepted by almost all the sample (over 95%), whereas only 0.6% disagreed totally. Its acceptance was so overwhelming, that it ended up being independent of sex, age, or level of studies. Nevertheless, as social sciences have shown (Fisher, 1992; Ford & Beach, 1951; Nieto, 1989; Rosenblatt & Anderson, 1981; Wilson & Nias, 1976), the couple is far from inherent to human nature, nor is it present in all cultures (polygamy, etc.). Once again, we can see the immense power of what we could call "romantic socialization" on our attitudes and beliefs regarding love and romantic relationships.

We will now comment on the correlations obtained between the "general belief in myths" score with other variables studied in the investigation. Specifically, taking into consideration only the correlations higher than .20, general belief in myths was positively correlated with: (a) duration of the relationship,  $r = .26$ ,  $p = .000$  (somewhat surprisingly; maybe it can be explained by Bem's self-perception theory, 1972); (b) feelings of sexual jealousy,  $r = .26$ ,  $p = .000$ ; and (c) attitude towards fidelity,  $r = .25$ ,  $p = .000$ . On the other hand, it was negatively correlated with: a) separation of sex, love, and marriage,  $r = -.29$ ,  $p = .000$ ; b) feeling sexual attraction towards others,  $r = -.28$ ,  $p = .000$ ; and c) sexual experience,  $r = -.23$ ,  $p = .000$ .

### *Link between sex, love, and marriage*

Concerning the link between sex, love, and marriage (see Tables 3 and 4, and Figure 2), the results suggest that, as a rule, Spaniards tend to accept that love and sex do exist outside of marriage (although, of course, percentages are far from 100%). However, it is difficult for the Spanish population to understand sexual relations without love, or love without sexual relations, or, even more so, marriage without sex or without love.

On the global score, obtained by averaging the scores on the six items, nearly 50 % of the sample scored below 3 (that is, they disagreed with the dissociation of the dimensions), 10 % scored in the explicitly medium point, another 10 % was missing, and 30 % scored above 3 (that is, they agreed with the dissociation of the three dimensions). Less than 5 % obtained a global score of 4 or above.

Table 4

*Correlations between Dissociation of Love-Sex-Marriage and Age and Studies*

Dimensions	Age		Studies	
	<i>r</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>n</i>
Sex without Marriage	-.40*	1920	.18*	1916
Love without Marriage	-.24*	1879	.15*	1875
Sex without Love	-.28*	1914	.16*	1910
Love without Sex	-.10*	1884	—	1880
Marriage without Sex	—	1883	—	1879
Marriage without Love	—	1898	—	1894
Global L-S-M score (dissociation of the three)	-.30*	1762	.17*	1758

Note. Empty cells indicate statistically nonsignificant differences.

\*  $p < .01$

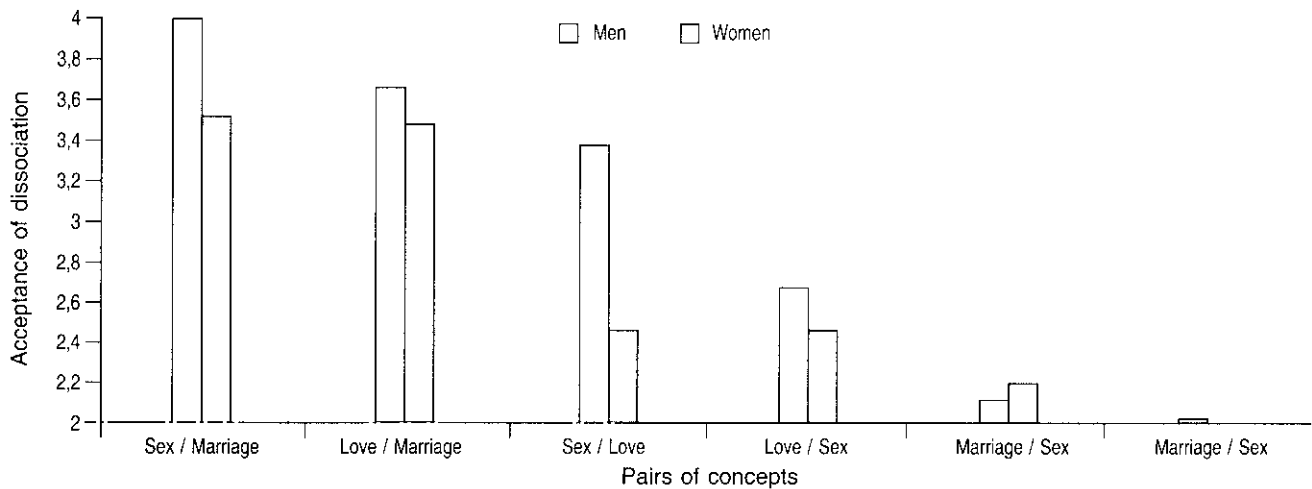


Figure 2. Acceptance of the dissociation of the pairs of concepts. (Slash means "without.") Higher columns indicate more acceptance of the dissociation. Lower columns indicate that the dissociation of the concepts is rejected.

On the other hand, coinciding with the results obtained by other authors (Avia, Carrillo, & Rojo, 1990; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Clark & Hatfield, 1989; Foa et al., 1987; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992; Yela, 1995, 1998), women tended to perceive such phenomena as more closely related than men, with greater sex differences appearing in the legitimization of loveless sex or sex outside of marriage. For example, 63% of the men approved of loveless sexual relationships, as compared to 33% of the women; the difference between the means (3.38 vs. 2.46 for men and women, respectively) was pronounced and highly significant,  $p = .000$ .

As a rule, we observed a tendency for older people to perceive less dissociation between love, sex, and marriage,  $r = -.30$ ,  $p < .01$ , especially with regard to the latter two. Thus, 59% of the youths (18-25 years) legitimated loveless sex, as compared to 25% of the oldest group (55-65 years). Whereas 90% of the youths approved of sex outside of marriage, this percentage dropped to 44% among the oldest group (see Table 5).

With regard to these aspects (legitimization of loveless sex, sex outside of marriage, and love without marriage), it seems that a higher level of studies coincided with

permissiveness, that is to say, greater acceptance of disconnecting the three dimensions. The correlation between the "separation of sex-love-marriage" and the level of studies was  $r = .17$ ,  $p < .01$ . Thus, among college graduates, the percentages of people that accepted such separations reached 63% (loveless sex), 85% (sex without marriage), and 74% (love without marriage), whereas among people with no studies, those percentages were 30%, 44%, and 46%, respectively. On the other hand, the concepts of loveless or sexless marriage, and love without sex were very uncommon and this did not seem to be influenced either by age or level of studies, indicating that it is a learned social factor (see Table 6).

The separation between sexual relations, love, and marriage was also moderately related with religious beliefs (agnostics-atheists' mean was 3.24 vs. the Catholics' mean, 2.74,  $p = .000$ ) and with religious behavior,  $r = -.28$ ,  $p = .000$ .

As in the case of romantic myths, we would like to highlight the correlations of the variable "separation of sex-love-marriage" with other relevant variables of the investigation. In this case, we obtained positive correlations (always higher than .20) with: a) sexual experience,  $r = .25$ ,

Table 5  
Percentage of Acceptance of Dissociation of Love-Sex-Marriage According to Age Range

Dimensions	Age ranges and number of subjects in each range				
	18-24 <i>n</i> = 367	25-34 <i>n</i> = 487	35-44 <i>n</i> = 398	45-54 <i>n</i> = 329	55-64 <i>n</i> = 366
Sex without Marriage	90	87	81	61	44
Love without Marriage	77	78	71	60	47
Sex without Love	59	58	52	37	25
Love without Sex	34	36	35	28	24
Marriage without Sex	22	19	20	17	17
Marriage without Love	16	20	22	17	13

Table 6

*Percentage of Acceptance of Dissociation of Love-Sex-Marriage According to Educational Level*

Dimensions	Educational level and number of subjects in each level					
	None <i>n</i> = 223	Primary <i>n</i> = 355	Secondary <i>n</i> = 778	Associate Degree <i>n</i> = 208	Some College <i>n</i> = 141	College Degree <i>n</i> = 145
Sex without Marriage	44	57	82	91	80	85
Love without Marriage	46	54	78	78	76	74
Sex without Love	30	33	31	63	45	63
Love without Sex	25	27	32	39	32	37
Marriage without Sex	16	18	20	20	17	21
Marriage without Love	15	15	19	18	20	27

$p = .000$ ; and b) feeling sexual attraction towards others,  $r = .21$ ,  $p = .000$ . At the same time, we obtained negative correlations with: (a) duration of the relationship,  $r = -.32$ ,  $p = .000$ ; (b) belief in myths,  $r = -.29$ ,  $p = .000$ ; and (c) attitude towards fidelity,  $r = -.20$ ,  $p = .000$ .

### Concluding Comments

The data obtained suggest that Spanish society strongly accepts most of the romantic myths (especially older people, religious people, and people with fewer years of formal education). At the same time, women tend to be slightly more romantic than men, especially concerning the importance of sexual "loyalty" for them. Finally, with regard to beliefs about love, there seems to be an important trend to link love with sex and with marriage, and this is also more pronounced among women, older people, religious people, and people with fewer years of formal education.

Basically, all these general trends confirm what was expected, taking into account the roles and the implicit procedures by which people become socialized in our culture. The differences between sexes can also be explained from a sociobiological approach, though this explains more about the origin of the differences rather than their maintenance and current strength.

We believe the consequences of holding these beliefs and myths deserve some consideration. For instance, the impact that linking marriage necessarily to passionate love has on the stability of marriage. Several authors have theorized about the paradox of the stability of a social institution such as marriage, built on the existence of an emotional link as vulnerable and fluctuating as the feeling experienced in the first phases of the relationship (Liebowitz, 1983; Mathes & Wise, 1983; Ortega y Gasset, 1917; Rougemont, 1938; Wilson & Nias, 1976). Some of the possible negative effects that the connection between passion and marriage could produce are: idealization, negative evaluation of conflict, internal attribution of negative aspects, and, above all, disappointment with the relationship.

The use of romantic myths as a standard by which to evaluate relationships generates expectations that are difficult to meet. The impossibility of maintaining the original idealization (Beck, 1988; Graziano & Musser, 1982; Kersten & Kersten, 1988) at times becomes a source of dissatisfaction with the relationship, which leads to typical negative behaviors (avoiding interaction, lack of emotional support towards one's partner, separate decision-making, decrease in joint activities, etc.) that make it hard to maintain the relationship (Kayser, 1993). The belief that emotion (passionate love) is a necessary and sufficient condition for maintaining a relationship leads to attitudes and behaviors that are harmful for the stability of a long-term relationship. One of these attitudes is the negative interpretation of conflict, in which conflict is considered a symptom of indifference. These internal attributions of the causes of the conflict ("if we have problems, it must mean that we don't love each other") have a negative effect on satisfaction (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990; Barrón & Martínez-Iñigo, in press). The belief that "communicating about the situation of the relationship is destructive, ineffectual, futile, and dangerous" (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985), also hinders management and resolution of conflicts.

Consequently, in order to obtain satisfaction and stability in long-term relationships such as marriage, the couple should restructure and modify part of their beliefs and myths, on which they based their initial expectations before the relationship began. The study and comprehension of this restructuring process will be of great help in terms of therapeutic intervention. This is a promising trend for future research.

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